



Information Technology

Recruiting and Retaining High Quality Professionals



Focus Groups

11/12 - 13/14 Grade Level

In this Report:



Part 1 - September 1998

Executive Introduction	2
The Opener	3
Responses to the Questions	3
Closing Comments	9



Focus Groups

15 - SES Grade Level

In this Report:



Part 2 - November 1998

Executive Introduction	10
Responses to the Questions	11
Closing Comments	18



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Executive Introduction



With the difficulties experienced in recruiting and retaining high quality Information Technology (IT) professionals, USDA recognizes the need to focus efforts on identifying specific ways to provide incentives to hire and keep employees with the skills needed to continue to provide high quality IT services around the world. With challenges ahead like Year 2000, GPRA/ITMRA, and overall reductions in budgets and human resources, USDA will need to strengthen the partnerships of the Information Technology and Human Resources communities.

On September 9 and 10, 1998, "Focus Groups" were conducted to collect information about the things that keep high quality IT professionals in the public sector. The following agencies (comprised of GS-11 through 14 levels) participated in the discussions. In trying to include the 7/9 grade levels, agencies either indicated that retention was not a problem at that level, or they did not have personnel at those levels to participate: (this may be addressed further at a later date)

- APHIS - Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service
- FS - Forest Service
- FSA - Farm Service Agency
- FSIS - Food Safety & Inspection Service
- NRCS - Natural Resources Conservation Service
- OHRM - Office of Human Resources Management
- RMA - Risk Management Agency

The Process

As an opener, the groups were asked to identify characteristics of a job announcement that would appeal to them if they were looking for a new job. (Things that would be most important to them as IT professionals.)

Next, six questions were presented to the group with an opportunity to validate their responses and provide additional comments at the end. Those questions were:

1. What brought you to work for the public sector?
2. What do you like about your job?
3. What things about your job keep you from leaving or looking for another job?
4. If you had to pick one word or short phrase that describes how you feel about being an IT professional in the public sector, what would it be?
5. Describe what you think would be the most significant thing your Agency could do overall in support of IT professionals?
6. Describe what you believe to be the most significant thing that your Agency/unit could do for you individually in the IT area?

The following report describes responses by each question either in inventory format or summarized narrative where appropriate. Responses by both 11/12 and 13/14 groups were combined. Where significant differences in responses between grade levels were apparent, the information is stated in the summary following the response.

The Opener



What would the perfect job announcement look like?

- Salaries comparable to private industry
- Awards/rewards/bonuses to acknowledge hard work
- Fair employment - advancement, promotion potential, career growth
- Good benefits, flexible work schedule/flexibility for work at home, retirement, vacation time, regular hours (40 hour week)
- State-of-the-art technology, chance to implement your skills and work with latest high tech equipment
- Training (up-to-date)/on and off the job
- Job unit - title of supporting group, reputation (known as being a good place to work)/professionalism, well funded organization
- Professional courtesy and respect
- Responsibility/challenges/challenging, productive assignments
- Excellent work environment (workplace, location, good co-workers that you can learn and share with)
- Job security
- Good management, good direct line manager, management listens

Summary

Both groups identified salary, opportunities for training, flexibility in hours and work environment, and up-to-date technology/equipment as important criteria for a worthwhile position. All participants agreed that *up-to-date equipment*, and *relevant training* in order to provide consistent service to their customers is a critical need for all IT positions.

Question 1



What brought you to work for the public sector?

- Started while in high school
- Started after college and stayed
- Job security, stability
- College courses paid for
- Flexible/convenient work hours
- Friend/spouse referred him/her
- Convenient - Only employer in the area; but stayed because of the flexibility
- Personal contacts referred job/job offered stability and learning opportunities
- Learning opportunities/provided training/additional responsibility to job
- Was a contractor or worked for the private sector and transitioned in
- Government needed more informed people to help with technical expertise
- Didn't like current job

Question 2**What do you like about your job?**

- Flexibility with work hours and schedule (ability to take time off when needed)
- Self-gratification in satisfying the customer, solving problems
- Enjoy working with the customers, built some friendships
- Family-oriented environment
- Good supervision
- Flexibility with supervisor
- Ability to speak; open-minded supervisors
- Ability to help people come through the ranks
- Like responsibilities - like the ability to pick projects
- Like the feeling of being in charge of something
- The ability to get involved in different things
- Like the feeling of accomplishing objectives
- Challenging work
- Opportunity for growth
- Continual learning - OJT; marketability other than where currently placed
- Feel that I am needed, valued
- Changing and new technology
- Benefits/retirement, etc.
- Opportunities to work in different locations
- I like the continual challenges so I don't get bored. I like jumping right in and working on problems.

Summary

Although flexibility was an important factor, most participants identified a desire to be challenged, opportunities to learn and grow in their field, and generally liking the people they work with as key elements which they *like* about their job. They discussed the satisfaction they experience when feeling their efforts are acknowledged and appreciated. Both groups identified self-gratification when doing the best work possible, but also recognized the importance of good *support by management* to do their jobs fully.

Question 3**What things about your job keep you from leaving or looking for another job?**

- Been there so long
- The benefits
- Happy with the benefits, but would not keep me
- Job security, stability
- Job satisfaction; position is challenging right now
- Like what I do
- Responsibility
- Need my paycheck, money, even though it's not enough
- Flexible work schedule; I may not have it elsewhere



- Less job pressure, family oriented
- Knowing I have set hours/schedule (40 hour week)
- Nothing
- Close to retirement
- Only holding on to accomplish current role (for experience) then leaving
- Technology is so old, I couldn't apply anywhere else
- Fear of the unknown - personal limitations - lack of self confidence
- Laziness, takes effort to look
- It's scary to think about not making it in the private sector. I like what I am doing right now.

Summary

The primary reasons most participants are remaining in the public sector are job security and benefits associated with working for the Federal Government which includes flexibility in work hours. However, most of the participants admitted to occasionally looking for other opportunities. Some believed they would not be eligible for jobs in the private sector due to their exposure only to old/outdated equipment, and are therefore not technologically experienced enough to apply elsewhere. Others admitted to being lazy due to the effort involved in finding another job. Both the 11/12 as well as the 13/14 groups had some responses of "nothing" when asked *What things about your job keep you from leaving or looking for another job?*

Question 4



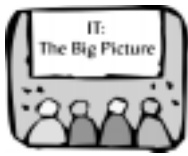
If you had to pick one word or short phrase that describes how you feel about being an IT professional in the public sector, what would it be?

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| • Cheated | • Rewarding |
| • Stagnation | • Good |
| • Blank | • Respected |
| • Job security | • Frustrated |
| • Unsatisfied | • Confused |
| • Cheated | • Energizing |
| • Not valued as much
(compared to the private sector) | • Fun |
| • Underrated | |
| • Used | |
| • Feel like a stepchild | |

Summary

Feeling valued and respected were elements discussed in both groups. The GS 11/12s discussed the need to feel appreciated and respected by their customers as well as by their *managers/supervisors*, and the GS 13/14s discussed the same needs from their customers and subordinates. The group of 11/12s was clearly describing negative images of their roles, while many of the 13/14s provided positive descriptions of being an IT professional.

Question 5



Describe what you think would be the most significant thing your Agency could do overall in support of IT professionals?

Equality

- Equal pay for equal work. Look at skill level, not grade level.
- Listen to IT professionals, but do it up front.
- Implement policies more equitably.
- Provide job or project opportunities more fairly.
- Provide everyone with the tools they need to do their job and at the right time. (Ex: Customer service should be receiving equipment and training before their customers.)
- Get rid of the "Dead Wood". People who aren't performing are still getting paid the same as the highly skilled performers. (When the agencies moved into the PC world, people were moved into the IT field who had little to no experience in that area.)

Training

- Provide the best, latest and greatest. This should be a priority in order for us to support our customers.
- Make sure money is available for all who need it; management has a tendency to look at the person requesting the money, not the appropriateness of the course.
- Build capacity in-house as opposed to contracting out services.
- Look at how money is distributed and/or where training is being given. "Crash courses" aren't necessarily the best; evaluate and have some type of quality assurance review process. Ex: retention of knowledge from a 1 week course versus an ongoing semester course. (\$3,000-\$5,000 one week course vs. a \$200 to \$300 cost of a semester at local college.)

Leadership

- Needs to be really solid; someone who knows more than me about my job - how best my job fits into big picture or process. (Some people in these jobs have been placed there for the wrong reasons, political roles, result of EEO settlements, eligible by time in grade but not the ability to manage.)
- When selecting managers in the IT community - make sure they have adequate technical knowledge and can manage and make decisions. "Everybody isn't a good leader."
- The OMB directive allowing for a percentage of increase in salary to retain is raising a lot of issues and concerns on implementation. How do you compensate one without compensating all? Are managers aware of their options and what incentives are available?
- Somehow managers need to have the ability to hire the people they know can do the job and compensate them accordingly.

Salary

- Needs to be more competitive with private sector; contractors are being hired at a higher salary and the government IT people are doing the same job (and supervising them) for less money.
- With the salaries we can offer, we cannot hire the experienced people we need to do the job. "The market is driving us and management needs to recognize it."

Structure

- Provide a fair structure for positions/promotions. Make sure this structure provides clear guidance.
- Take a good look at the structure so better management can be accomplished.
- Titles are extremely important to people; organize them more in-line with private industry; do away with the generic "Computer Specialist" title. Appropriate titles, training and recognition may help current grading levels and may provide incentives, not just higher salaries.
- Revise the job descriptions so they more accurately reflect the jobs we do.
- Provide clear structure with well defined career paths and, potential for upward mobility. (This could help reduce or minimize the opportunities for grievances when trying to implement policies.)
- Look at other agencies such as the Department of Transportation - they provide a structure to the technical 14 grade level that does not require you to be a manager.

Recognition/Valued

- Change the attitudes at the program manager level about the contribution and importance of IT to the function of a program.
- Recognize the existence of the IT professionals before you need them.
- Reward/award (not necessarily money). "Sometimes a pat on the shoulder just doesn't do the trick."
- Respect IT professionals (other areas of expertise seem to carry higher credibility).

Summary

Many of the issues discussed in response to this question were very similar. Both groups value *recognition, equality, and effective management* as a form of Agency support for IT. Use of *trained, effective, qualified managers* is a **priority** to the IT community for all agencies. It was suggested that many of the current managers/supervisors of IT programs were inappropriately placed. The groups agreed on the need for managers to be better trained for their positions (technically and administratively) and that those supervising should be technically qualified to understand the work being done.

Question 6

Describe what you believe to be the most significant thing that your Agency/unit could do for you individually in the IT area?

- Get me a new computer/software
- More money
- More training
- Ensure that managers have technical knowledge , good leadership
- Lay out achievable goals/direction; give a clear direction and back it up with staffing and training
- Give me opportunity to grow with my job, opportunity to excel, high level projects
- Give me the type of work I like to do, more flexibility to choose what I work on
- Accountability - hold people accountable
- Reorganize structure - use teams and coaches, remove branch chiefs that are ineffective/destructive
- Need support from immediate supervisors
- Recognition - those things I do above/beyond my job (certificate, money, etc.)
- Reward for a good job done; recognition for what you can do
- Promotion - don't just suggest I leave to get opportunities
- Recognize the intelligence level of people; overcome perceptions; just let me do my job and don't micromanage; should only have to prove yourself once, then trust should be built
- Provide professional courtesy and respect
- Provide funding for IT (make IT a priority)
- Hire an assistant
- Hire a help desk with experienced people in areas needed
- Provide training (formal, not just OJT)
- Take me out of management and let me go back to technical work, provide an avenue to get a promotion other than management
- Take away some duties - "Just because I *can* do it doesn't mean I can do it all"
- Provide more guidance in knowing where IT is going and what positions are available
- Provide a structure that was known in advance with clearly mapped out opportunities for advancement
- Standardize work-at-home; job can be performed from home

Summary

This question brought out the differences between the expectations of the 11/12s and of the 13/14s. The 11/12s were clearly needing financial support, i.e. equipment and training, as well as demonstrations of appreciation and recognition from their managers, i.e. awards, certificates, and thank you's. The 13/14s were also looking for recognition, but they appeared to be looking for better defined policies and needed dependable management to provide them direction and support.

Closing Comments



- No significant differences among the different agencies.
- Implementation of recruiting and retaining policies need to be carefully thought through.
- Morale of IT professionals in general is suffering.
- IT folks do not perceive that agencies value the IT (staff) contribution to Agency business functions.
- As a result of inability to obtain salaries comparable to the private sector, employees are looking for better benefits (flexibility in schedules, work at home, more family friendly environments).
- Desire for strong solid management to support IT initiatives and help provide a structure that clearly maps out opportunities for advancement and purpose.

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A Special Thanks to all who donated their time to participate and provide such valuable input to finding ways to help Recruit and Retain High Quality Information Technology Professionals in the Federal Government.



Executive Introduction



As a follow-up to the results of the September 9 and 10 **Focus Groups**, the Office of the Chief Information Office (OCIO) for USDA requested additional information be collected in regard to this topic of Recruiting and Retaining High Quality IT Professionals, and asked that managers at the grades 15 through SES participate. On November 18, 1998, Focus Groups were conducted to collect information in response to the results presented in Part 1 of this report. The focus of the discussions were targeted mainly to the responses to Question 5 of the September focus groups, "Describe what you think would be the most significant thing your Agency could do overall in support of IT professionals."

The following agencies were represented in the focus groups:

- AMS - Agricultural Marketing Service
- APHIS - Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service
- FS - Forest Service
- FSA - Farm Service Agency
- FSIS - Food Safety & Inspection Service
- OCIO - Office of the Chief Information Officer

The Process

As an opener, the groups were asked to identify their titles and describe roles and responsibilities in their associated agencies within USDA. Six questions were presented to the group with an opportunity to validate their responses and add additional comments at the end. Those questions were:

1. In just a word or phrase, what was your first impression or reaction to the responses you saw in the first report?
2. After seeing the responses from the various agency representatives of what is needed to support IT overall in the categories listed (equality, training, leadership, salary, structure, recognition/valued) - think about some of the initiatives/projects/plans that you are currently working on...Do any of these address any of the things mentioned in Question 5 in the Report from the September Focus Groups?
3. Of these things that you are currently doing, could you share some of the barriers that you had to deal with and what you did to overcome them?
4. Looking over the responses, (again from Question 5) do you believe there are things that are **not feasible** to do and why? (Do you believe you could defend your position from a policy standpoint?) (What would you need to do them?)
5. Of the things you believe **are feasible** to do, that you are maybe not currently doing, what 2 key things do you believe that as a manager you could commit to doing to help address these issues?
6. If you were appointed CIO of USDA today - what would be the first thing you would do to help address the IT recruitment and retention issues? Remember, you have heard the concerns, and listened to what others in other agencies are dealing with or doing and some of their barriers and successes.

The following report describes responses by each question either in inventory format or summarized narrative where more appropriate.

Question 1



In just a word or phrase, what was your first impression or reaction to the responses you saw?

(Inventory list grouped by like responses)

- On track. We do tend to focus on money as being the driver, because it is the biggest satisfier under the surface.
- Not surprising but some things are missing.
- Not surprising - discrepancies on series across Agencies.
- No surprise - I've lost a lot of people to private industry; change in Federal Benefits now make private more tempting, i.e. FERS vs. CSRS.
- Accurate on one level and naivete on another level. Participants perceive managers as having all of this money, time, authority, etc. to fix everything and we don't.
- Fairly accurate. Still have some concerns and ideas.
- Nothing unique to IT; all people want the same things.
- Made me aware of available tools we may not have known about.
- Reconfirms/reinforces other documentation I have read.
- Idealistic wish list - not terribly useful. (not focused on what the real problem is)

Summary

Most participants agreed that there were no surprises in reading the responses from the previous focus groups. They did believe, however, that some of the responses were because of the lack of knowledge of what activities are currently going on in support of this issue. This group agreed that they don't believe enough is being done but also agree that they themselves are not effectively communicating to their employees about what is being done in support of IT. It was agreed that a significant amount of information is on various websites, but left to the interpretation by the reader. No follow-up work regarding this information has occurred.

Question 2



After seeing the responses from the various agency representatives of what is needed to support IT overall in the categories listed (equality, training, leadership, salary, structure, recognition/valued) - think about some of the initiatives/projects/plans that you are currently working on...Do any of these address any of the things mentioned in Question 5 in the Report from the September Focus Groups?

(Listed by categories, followed by key challenges associated with actions being taken)

Equity (Combined with **Recognition/Valued**)

Training

- Established a special allocation for training the Agency on new standard software and operating systems.
- Providing employees with state-of-the-art technology.

Leadership

- Working on changing the attitudes. We are now hiring with the expectation that the employee should expect to only stay for 2-3 years. Manager must work the transitions of people into their planning. College grad have new attitudes/expectations and skills. (*quote*, "People are not working only to plan for retirement.") Consider this type of hiring (that with the expectation that they will be moving on in a couple of years) as a Highly technical training experience. (*quote*, "You can't keep doing *Business as Usual* anymore.")
- Use of Contractor Support has been incorporated to **broaden** staff, **not replace it**. Initial reaction to Contractors was felt to be "An Admission of a Lack of Skills", but worked to demonstrate how this would be a source of support.
- Managers are now selecting IT projects with critical review. Managers have responsibility to make better decisions about which projects are accepted. Previously, projects would begin, people would put 2-3 years of energy into it, then the person who initiated the project would leave and there was no completion of the project.
- We put back more structure, and organized into teams after a restructuring that proved to be **too unstructured**.
- After switching to a higher technological system, skill wise we recognized we were unable to accommodate the user needs. We added back a number IT positions in support of critical functions. We were able to create them as bridge or career positions, such as 7/9/11's, allowing us to look for educational experience and not necessarily years of occupational experience.

Salary

- Working on a plan to provide retention bonuses and other incentives.
- Have begun conversations with personnel regarding retention. Asking that the Department look at pay banding.

Structure

- Reclassified some key positions to Expert levels .
- Working on restructuring technical grades, trying to keep high grades without making them supervisors.
- Involved in Work Force Planning regarding training, retention, and developing strategies for lowering employee to supervisor ratios.

Recognition/Valued

- Awarded a lot of people for work on implementation efforts for new agency standard (major agency-wide project.)
- Investigating the computer certification process to find out what it takes to be certified in a certain IT area. These types of certifications, in combination with education and experience will enhance our abilities to reward or pay employees based on individual skill levels.

Key Challenges Surrounding These Areas:

Implementation of policies and classification standards across USDA

- How do you implement policy so the people you really want to reward get rewarded without getting EEO's/grievances from others?
- Classification problems; not enough high salary positions for highly technical jobs - they leave Federal government at that point. Studies have shown that Private industry pays *40-45% higher salaries* for these jobs. When comparing position descriptions in Federal vs. Private, Federal pay is about 1/3. Would like to look at pay banding.
- How the classification specialists apply/implement the policies for series and salaries. Human Relations (HR) limitations; hiring policies haven't changed in 35 years. Position descriptions, series, pay scales aren't applicable any more.
- Management above the CIO hasn't addressed the classification problems.
- Equity in applying HR policies. Other Federal Departments have non-supervisory 15's, some have positions to 14, and others have nothing higher than 12! (Very uneven interpretations throughout).
- People's responses [in Part 1 - the initial report] have validity, but we're out of options until policies are consistent across the Department.

Support and Commitment from Leadership

- IT training is expensive and we have a small capacity budget. The training would help give the employee a sense of assurance or competence. We need to get them certified but the executive leadership has a fear of the employee leaving once they are certified. Not getting enough support from executive leadership regarding IT issues. They need to provide direction for the people.
- Managers don't see computer people as Technical Roles; (*quote*, "One step above janitor.")
- Leadership: very experienced, but believe most are looking at buyouts.
- It may be cheaper to contract out for technical positions. Federal (salary) can't compete in the Private sector.

Recognition and Awards

- Reward with best/newest equipment or training, not just money. These people want the best/newest more than money. \$400 worth of equipment may be a *better reward* rather than a \$500 cash award.
- We are supervising 13-14's, we already know they make good salaries; they want *recognition, respect*. Award money is administered secretly, which makes for poor morale. Management believes if *awards are made public in an attempt to recognize a job well done, more EEO complaints will result*.
- Some agencies can provide substantial awards/money - other organizations can't for the same type of jobs being done. Especially difficult when these people *physically* sit side-by-side or share buildings and office space.

- Some agencies have been successful in attracting employees without the salary being an issue - but once they have established attractive skills, if we don't provide opportunities for them to continue to develop, we'll lose them.

Summary

It is clear that while agencies have identified the recruitment and retention challenges within the IT community, there are many issues and challenges associated with these actions and activities (as listed above) that need attention. One key thing that should be mentioned: we know that it would be impossible to compete with salaries being offered in the private sector, but because policies are applied unequally throughout the USDA, the danger of agencies losing employees to other government agencies is very likely. The uniform application of policy would appear to be critical in maintaining and hiring a workforce that is looking for the benefits of working for the Federal Government.

Question 3



Of these things that you are currently doing, could you share some of the barriers that you had to deal with and what you did to overcome them?

(Some barriers addressed in Question 2 - previous page)

Barrier- - - - - -

- Perception that IT is not mission critical or valuable and is just another administrative function that can be downsized - we need to actually work on increasing it. Funds aren't available for IT.

Work in Progress- - - - -

- I continue to educate Executive leadership and show the links to the mission. I continue to sit down with program managers and explain how the decision to provide training for IT personnel, for example, would be beneficial to them. I work with our management and have them make a list of IT services they need and the resources that we have to do the work.

Barrier- - - - - -

- Filling the gaps where certain IT skills do not exist within the organization. We need to make sure that employees **in-house** have the opportunities for training and challenging work as well.

Work in Progress- - - - -

- Try to use contractors to supplement and enhance, not replace. Maintain a mix of employees to contractors. Contracting does at least give you the flexibility to hire/layoff non-performers.

Barrier- - - - - -

- Dealing with users who are becoming increasingly more computer literate. The user/employee is approaching IT with a solution in hand and perceive themselves as knowing more than the IT personnel.

Work in Progress - - - - -

- We are trying to educate IT personnel and get them to be more customer service oriented. A lot of the IT folks are technical introverts and it is hard to get them to open up and express a softer side when dealing with customers.

Barrier- - - - - -

- Being able to recruit the skill level to do the job. In particular, dealing with different personality types of technical people. Job descriptions, etc. are so generic the certification list becomes so large you can't get through the applicants.

Work in Progress - - - - -

- Be very specific on job skill requirements when recruiting. When conducting interviews for new hires, we made a number of questions that deal with customer service skills. This helped to hire a person with more people skills which has usually been the problem more so than the lack of technical skills.

Barrier- - - - - -

- Dealing with IT employees. We have two kinds of people: those who have been doing the same job for 15 years and others beginning their careers. We have offered to pay for training but some wouldn't take advantage of it and some want more money but don't want to expand their skills.

Work in Progress - - - - -

- I found that using contractors to fill skills that our organization does not have works well because the employees feel that it doesn't take away from their work opportunities since they don't currently possess the required skills.

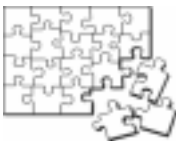
Barrier- - - - - -

- Some people just aren't change oriented. They are unwilling to learn and change their niche because they are comfortable with their current knowledge base. IT is changing all of the time. They feel threatened by change because they don't know how they fit into the picture.

Work in Progress - - - - -

- Management doesn't deal with this.

Question 4



Looking over the responses (from Question 5 of the September Focus Group) do you believe there are things that are not feasible to do and why? (Do you believe you could defend your position from a policy standpoint?) (What would you need to do them?)

(Inventory List grouped by like comments)

Classification standards:

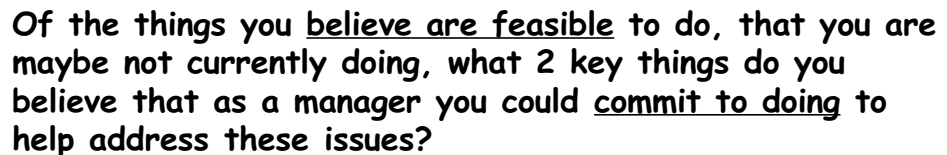
- Nothing is impossible but there needs to be a consistent structure or approach throughout USDA. You can't change the classification because the classifier doesn't approve the changes. They are so outdated. We need to treat IT more professionally. The IT personnel seem offended to learn that they are considered administrative; it should be a more professional series.
- Personnel policies/practices are what needs to be changed. Without cooperation or strong partnership with HR component, these activities do not appear feasible.

- Direct hiring:**

- ## Management/Leadership

- ## Summary

Question 5



- ## Summary

A significant number of the focus group participants felt that making these commitments were out of their hands.

Question 6

If you were appointed CIO of USDA today - what would be the first thing you would do to help address the IT recruitment and retention issues? Remember, you have heard the concerns, and listened to what others in other agencies are dealing with or doing and some of their barriers and successes.

(Inventory List from Participants grouped by like areas)

- Take control of the IT area and provide some real interface.
- Use more control to exercise authority without taking away from the interface.
- Unless you exercise your authority, it will never be challenged.
- Currently, authority isn't being exercised unless there is an emergency issue. For example: the Y2K project.
- Escalate the priority of the issue and make decisions - speed up the process.
- Implement ideas immediately.
- I would get together with my counterpart in HR and develop a plan together to make changes.
- Bring in someone from private industry to ask of them, what's going on out there, then come to a consensus with HR to make changes.
- I would work with the agencies, find what the needs are, and make changes with those specific needs in mind:
 - More flexibility for agencies
 - Improve technology
- Market proactively; partner with HR leadership, work to raise respect of IT roles to the rest of the Agency programs.
- Work with senior managers to raise their awareness to these issues.
- Open the door for direct hiring authority or offer a comparable suite of hiring capabilities.
- Do a quick assessment of reclassifications and/or put together something to help the issue.
- Implement reclassification.
- Focus on delivery of services; new structure is needed. Industry has changed, and we need to find ways to work *with it*.

Summary

Most indicated that exercising firm authority and promoting the partnership with HR is needed. It was clearly communicated by the groups that the HR component is the missing link to resolving a significant number of IT issues.

Closing Comments



- Uniform implementation of policies and classification standards across USDA seem to be the theme for key challenges for managers in the government.
- We know that it would be impossible to compete with salaries being offered in the private sector, but because policies are applied unequally throughout the USDA, the danger of agencies losing employees to other government agencies is very likely. The uniform application of policy would appear to be critical in maintaining and hiring a workforce that is looking for the benefits of working for the Federal Government.
- It is believed that while more tools are becoming available to enhance the ability to recruit and retain high quality employees, it is felt that these tools are not clearly defined or understood by management - there seems to be a clear gap between the Human Resources and the Information Technology communities.
- Managers need a clearer definition of the authorities of their associated CIO's.

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A Special Thanks to all who donated their time to participate and provide such valuable input to finding ways to help Recruit and Retain High Quality Information Technology Professionals in the Federal Government.